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IV —MUTARE PULICES.

A COMMENT ON LUCILIUS, NON. 351, M.

As far as it is safe to infer from the few single lines now surviving, most of which are due to Nonius, the theme of Lucilius in his twenty-sixth book was not unlike that of the first satire of the second book of Horace. Among other matters, the poet certainly specified the readers whose approbation he most desired, perhaps dilated on the nature of his satire, and, apparently in a dialogue with some acquaintance, explained and defended his reasons for not following the usual public career of a Roman in his position. He also seems to have told why he did not choose to marry and rear a family, duties which, as Marx has shown, had recently been brought home to the Roman citizen by the law of Metellus Macedonicus. A fragment quoted by Nonius (351, M.) to illustrate *mutare* in what he conceived to be the sense of *derelinquere* is generally connected with this discussion.

In the best manuscripts of Nonius, the Berne and Geneva, Xth century; the first hand of the Harleian 2719, IXth century, and the second hand of the Paris 7667, Xth century, a MS copied from the Harleian, the line runs:

Mihi quidem non persuadetur, *pulices* mutem meos.

This text was adopted by Dousa and afterwards, without comment, by Quicherat (edit. of Nonius, 1872, p. 401).

The reading of the Harleian, second hand; of the Paris, first hand; of the Leiden and Wolfenbüttel MSS, and, according to Lachmann's critical note (Lucil. 599), of the Basel edition, is *pub-lices*. Without some emendation, *publices* is, of course, impossible. The Aldine of 1513; H. Junius, Antwerp, 1565, and Lachmann (Lucilius, Berlin, 1876) emend to *publice ut* mutem. Mercier, the first great editor of Nonius, in the Paris edition of 1614, writes *publice* mutem. According to this emendation of the text, *publice* is to be taken in its not unusual sense of 'in the service' or 'on

behalf, of the state,' and with *meos* some word like *amicos* or *familiares* might be either understood or supposed to occur in the following line. We should therefore translate: 'You won't induce me at least to change my friends for the benefit of the state,' and should agree, for example, with Sellar, *Roman Poets of the Republic*, p. 230, that we have here one of the poet's reasons for preferring a private life.

In his edition of Lucilius (1872, XXVI 13) Müller made the very simple emendation to *publicis* (i. e. *publiceis*) mutem, explaining the word (p. 246) by *τελωνία*, and supplying *familiares* with *meos*. This makes the fragment differ slightly in meaning, but it would be used in the same connection as before. If, however, we are to believe Nonius, the difficulty with the text after Müller's emendation is that *mutare* does not mean *dereelinquere*, but is used in its ordinary sense. It was apparently for this reason that Müller gave up *publicis* and, in his edition of Nonius, I, p. 568 (1888), wrote *Publi, utei* mutem, just as his vessel of wrath, Francken—neither seems to have ever mentioned the other in this connection—proposed, *Mnemos. XVI* 396, to read *Publie ut* mutem, supporting his form of the vocative by Priscian, 301, K. and supplying *lares* with *meos*. In both cases the connection of thought appears to be about the same as before.

If we except Dousa and Quicherat, there are certainly two objections to all the texts so far mentioned. First, they *are* emendations, and, speaking in general, these should be the last resort; and second, *publices*, upon which they are all founded and from which successive editors take us farther away, is itself not the reading of the best MSS. It is clear, as Stowasser well observes (*Wiener Stud. V* 262), that "the text-tradition calls for something else." The best MS reading for this flea-bitten line is, without a doubt, *pulices*. But Stowasser thinks that *paelices* was the text of the archetype. Being derived from a single reading (*pullices*, Paris 7667, M²), the emendation has the peculiarity of being as easy from the side of palaeography as it is unlikely from all other points of view. Having adopted the word, we must either change *meos* to *meas* or suppose that *paelices* here was exceptionally masculine. Stowasser chooses the second alternative, and supports it by Sueton., *Caes.* 49; Martial, *XII* 97, 3 (96, 3, Fr.), and Festus, 222, M. But these examples do not impress me as having any bearing on the gender of *paelex*. They simply show that the word was sometimes applied to males.

Professor Stowasser then proceeds to associate with his emended fragment XXVI 22, M. and XXVII 28, M.—Arcades ambo—and adds: “Lucilius war ja stark in der *μουσα παιδική*.”

It was evidently the same train of thought that led Baehrens, FPR. 1886, Lucil. 503, to print *podices*. Francken, l. c., claimed not to understand this emendation, but *podices* can hardly fail to be clear enough to a more worldly mind.¹ Surely neither the great satirist nor his text deserves such revision as this.

As we review this long discussion it is interesting to observe how completely every one seems to have forgotten that perhaps the best text, just as it stands, may mean something. While Dousa and Quicherat adopted *pulices*, each did so without comment.

The only suggestion from this point of view, and it seems to me the best, comes from Birt, *Zwei politische Satiren*, etc., Marburg, 1888, p. 121. He makes this line belong to the speech of some man who is not only dirty but remains so from choice, and reads:

Mihi quidem non persuadetur. Pulices mutem meos?

“Ich soll mich von meinem Ungeziefer trennen? Das redet mir keiner ein!”

Certainly Birt's interpretation has some marked advantages over all the others proposed. The greatest of them are that it preserves the best text unaltered and, at the same time, gives good sense. Moreover, the insertion of a period disposes of the subjunctive without *ut* after *persuadetur*, which, although Sall. Iug. 35, 2, gives one undoubted example, I have not found elsewhere. This interpretation also gives us *mutare* in the sense of *derelinquere*, which, it is true, is in conformity with the lemma of Nonius. But for that very reason, may we not object to the possible truth of Birt's view?

Was *mutare* ever used in the literal sense of ‘trennen,’ ‘part with,’ *derelinquere*, as Nonius puts it? Except in his own statement, I have been quite unable to find a shred of testimony for it. It is unfortunate that every other example he may have quoted under this head has been lost, otherwise we might be in a better position to test his view. But while I can not find a single undoubted case in which *mutare* is equivalent to *derelinquere*, it is perhaps worth noting that there are those in which to translate *mutare* by *dere-*

¹ Though Baehrens would hardly have been able to find examples for his figurative use of *podex*.

linquere not only gives good sense but, as far as it goes, the right sense. Such a case is Vergil, Aen. 3, 161 *mutandae sedes*, which, as Müller observes in his note to Nonius, l. c., and, as I proved by an examination of Vergil's usage, is the only example that Nonius could have consistently quoted from this author. That he did quote one from him is not certain, but it is rendered probable by the fact that, although the reference itself has dropped out, the name of Vergil, as shown by Müller's text and his critical note, was, in some way, connected with the passage.

Now, without wishing to cast any further aspersion on the memory of a well-meaning old gentleman who has been vilified often enough, and sometimes without cause, by generations of impatient scholars, it is not going too far to say that he would be quite capable of translating Vergil's sentence *mutandae sedes* by *sedes derelinquendae sunt*. This is good sense, and half of the right sense. The other half is something like *et aliae* [*sedes*] *petendae*.

In short, I can not find any example of *mutare* in which the equivalent of the thing changed, i. e. the thing changed for, is not either expressed or implied. If the equivalent is of the same sort, it is regular both in Latin and English not to mention it. Hence the common use of *mutare* 'change' with a direct object alone: *mutare consilium, vestem, solum, testamentum, propositum*, etc., etc., 'to change one's plans,' sc. for plans, i. e. other plans, 'one's clothes,' of course, for other clothes, etc.

Certainly Nonius is hardly strong enough—unless propped with good examples, and in this case he is not—to support one against what seems a universal law of usage. Until, therefore, we have something more than his own statement supported—as far as we are concerned—by a single example which, it is more than likely, he did not understand and had never seen in its original setting, I see no reason why we should not include the fragment before us in a category which ought to apply to the whole language. Let us translate *mutare pulices meos* as we translate *mutare vestem, consilium*, and every other case in which the thing for which the change is made, being of the same sort as the thing changed, is not expressed. By so doing we have :

Mihi quidem non persuadetur pulices mutem meos :

'You won't induce me, anyhow, to change my fleas' (that is, of course, 'for other fleas').

Does any one at all familiar with the temperament of the flea, especially one whose memory is still vivid of the first few nights he spent in an Italian hotel, fail to perceive what is meant here by the metaphor of 'changing fleas'? If so, let me, by way of a brief excursus in Natural History, remind him and all those who have never sojourned in a flea-bitten latitude that the *Pulex Irritans* has a marked fondness for strangers. New blood rouses him to what, even for him, is supernatural activity. If one changes his fleas—and in Italy this seems to be the only difference in one's relations with them that he can hope to bring about—one is certain to be worse off, because, for the time being, he is the palatable stranger. This fact is not only perfectly well known, but has doubtless been known ever since the prehistoric beginning of this association between the eater and the eaten.

In other words, *mutare pulices* is a vulgar but expressive metaphor characteristic of both Lucilius and his department, and corresponds to our proverbial "out of the frying-pan into the fire."

Thus interpreted, the general import of the fragment is perfectly clear, although it is not certain who was the speaker, nor in which of several quite possible connections the remark was made. One is tempted, however, to suggest the time-honored theme of marriage *versus* single-blessedness which we know to have been discussed in this book. If so, let us suppose, by way of illustration, that the *dramatis personae* here were Lucilius and some friend, perhaps a married man, or, at least, an admirer of the new law, who has been trying to convert the poet by descanting at large on the disadvantages of his single life. Could we have an answer more pointed and, at the same time, more characteristic of the confirmed old bachelor Lucilius than

Mihi quidem non persuadetur pulices mutem meos?

The import of the expression *pulices mutare* is not disturbed by the fact that the illustration just given is only one from a number of possible situations.

We may be sure, of course, that Lucilius was not the first to use a metaphor suggested by pests that both in Greece and Italy

Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
multi.

The character of the phrase, which is clearly popular, gives one good reason to suspect that it may be the proverbial short-hand statement of some old story belonging, by preference, to the realm

of the fable. Such a fable, attributed, in so many words, to Aesop, is found in Aristotle, *Rhet.* II 20, 6 f. (Halm, 36). Apropos of the use which the orator may make of the fable as a *παράδειγμα* or illustration, Aristotle quotes two as examples; first the famous fable which Stesichoros applied to Phalaris, and, second, the following:

"A popular leader at Samos was being tried for his life. Aesop, in the course of a speech to the people, said:

'Once on a time, a Fox, while fording a Stream, was swept away into a Gorge. Not being able to get out, she was for a long time in a sorry plight, and Dog-ticks in great numbers fastened upon her. Finally, a Hedgehog, while wandering about, saw her and, taking pity, asked whether he should not get the Ticks off. But she said "No," and being asked why, replied: "These are now full of me and draw but little blood. If you drive them off, Others will come, who are famished, and drink out of me what blood there is left." And so in your case, men of Samos, this man will do no further injury—he is rich—but if you put this one to death, others will come who are poor. They will steal what you have left.'"¹

For our purpose, the literary *milieu* of this Aesopic fable is interesting and significant. If the fable of the Fox and Dog-ticks was established in the rhetorical tradition as early as Aristotle and sanctioned by so great an authority, we may be tolerably certain that it remained there, and was familiar to many generations of boys as a stock example. In fact, Plutarch, 790 C (*An Seni gerenda* etc.) does quote a portion of it, though, perhaps, directly from Aristotle. Certainly, the following passage from Josephus,

¹ It was undoubtedly from this passage that Vanbrugh drew the following scene (*Aesop*, act II, vol. I, p. 200, Ward). Two tradesmen of Samos are petitioning Aesop for a new governor:

Aesop. Why, what's the matter with your old one?

2d Tra. What's the matter? Why, he grows rich; that's the matter; and he that's rich can't be innocent; that's all.

Aesop. Does he use any of you harshly? or punish you without a fault?

2d Tra. No, but he grows as rich as a miser; his purse is so crammed, it's ready to burst again.

Aesop. When 'tis full 'twill hold no more. A new governor will have an empty one.

2d Tra. 'Fore Gad, neighbour, the little gentleman's in the right on't!

1st Tra. Why, truly I don't know but he may. For now it comes in my head, it cost me more money to fat my hog, than to keep him fat when he was so. Prithee, tell him we'll e'en keep our old governor."

Arch. 18, 6, 5, the reference to which I owe to Professor Warren, has every appearance of being a garbled version of it. The passage is one referring to the well-known provincial policy of Tiberius, which, in fact, was quite in line with the method recommended by Aesop. After telling why he never "turned the rascals out," the emperor, "by way of illustration, told this story:

'A certain man was lying sorely hurt and the flies gathered about his wounds in swarms. Somebody who happened upon him, pitying his evil case and thinking that he could not help himself, stood by and had nearly succeeded in scaring them off, when the man begged of him to stop. When asked why he was so indifferent about escaping from the pest he replied: 'Why, you would do me great harm by driving these flies away. They are already full of blood and no longer so eager to trouble me; indeed, they even hold up now and then. But the others are fresh and hungry—if they fastened on me, exhausted as I am already, they would soon make an end of me.'"

Unless we count our Lucilian fragment, I find no other trace of this fable in Latin. But this does not prove that there was none. In fact, it is not impossible that this very line is a fragment of the fable itself. We know that Lucilius, like Ennius and Horace, told fables, and that they were characteristic of satire. The principal objection to the theory that Lucilius was actually retelling the Aesopic fable, as related by Aristotle, or that his *mutare pulices* was drawn directly from it, is the fact that the Latin equivalent given for Aesop's dog-tick, *κυνοπαῖστις*, is *ricinus*, not *pulex*. But it is perhaps worth noting that in the Italian version of Aesop's fable, to which Dr. Shaw has called my attention, the word employed for *κυνοπαῖστις*, although *ricino* is still found in the lexicons, is the regular modern Italian *pulci* (*pulices*), and such may have been the popular usage even in Lucilius' time, just as in the ordinary speech of this country dogs have 'fleas.' 'Dog-ticks' infest only the Latin and Greek lexicons.

But whether Lucilius' expression in this line is a metaphor drawn from the simple observation of ordinary life, whether it is derived from an old fable, or whether it is actually a portion of that old fable, is not a question of vital importance, since in all those cases the point, so far as interpretation is concerned, is the same. It is the flea himself who tells us in no uncertain terms that *pulices mutare* is the equivalent of our popular phrase: "Out of the frying-pan into the fire."

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